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SUBJECT: PRT BASRA: ROUND-UP OF RECENT POLITICAL MEETINGS

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¶1. (U) This cable provides summaries of PRT meetings held since July 13 with various Iraqi officials. These meetings have not been the subject of front-channel reporting. Complete reports of all these meetings are available by email by contacting MalloryJL@state.gov with a request for specific reports.

Waleed Ketan (July 13, 2009)

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Chair of the Basra Provincial Council Planning Committee

¶2. (SBU) Ketan was our initial interlocutor from the PC to discuss USG-funded infrastructure projects. Much of the meeting dealt with the status of various proposals and issue of whether the PC had to approve all existing and future USG reconstruction projects in Basra. (See Basra 045 for a full report on the discussions with Ketan, and subsequent meetings with the PC Chair, and other PC members on this issue.) On the political front, Ketan (a member of Iraqi National Accord) saw a steep decline in the popularity of national secular parties, and thought the upcoming national elections could be a death knell for some of the smaller parties.

Sheikh Kadim Abud Shehab Rivat al Gatrani (July 18, 2009)

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Head of Kutarna Tribe and Noble Man Council in Basra

¶3. (SBU) The sheikh requested USG assistance in getting approval to set up tribal-led security operations along the Iraq-Iran border to reduce smuggling and terrorist attacks. He singled out the Abu al-Khasid region as the main smuggling point for oil in the Basra region. We responded that the Iraqi government, not the USG, was in charge of border security. Sheikh Kadim lamented Iraq's reliance on Iran for even the most basic commodities, and criticized Iraqi leaders for not stopping Iran and Kuwait from reportedly stealing Iraqi oil through diagonal drilling.

Mohammed Mosbeh Wa'eli (July 25, 2009)

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Former Governor of Basra Province

¶4. (SBU) Wa'eli faulted the current government for failure to follow up on reconstruction projects begun during his tenure and slowness in initiating new projects. He spoke about the political ambitions of the PC Chair to unseat the current governor and take his place. He characterized Governor Shiltagh as an inexperienced and ineffective politician, and said that the central government was unhappy with the performance of the Basra government. The one bright spot Wa'eli saw was the inauguration of construction for a massive "Sports City" in Basra that he believed would boost employment and attract investment.

Shiltagh Abud (July 29, 2009)

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Governor of Basra

¶ 15. (SBU) In a bid to attract foreign investment, Governor Shiltagh sought USG assistance to help change the negative perceptions of Iraq among American business people. He stated that his top priorities were improving essential services (electricity water, sewage, trash removal), but said that the previous government's commitment to fund a large number of projects had drained the government's coffers. The governor took on board information on how the USG might offer assistance, and raised the idea of building a lock system on the Shat al-Arab waterway to prevent salt water from flowing up river.

Sa'ad Mati Potrous (August 5, 2009)

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Member of the Basra Provincial Council (United Democratic Party of the Chaldeans)

¶ 16. (SBU) Potrous, the only Christian member of the Provincial Council, has suspended his membership over frustrations that the PC is disregarding Christian interests. He list of grievances included lack of PC movement on his two proposals -- funding a Christian community center and buying mini-buses to transport small children to school -- and its lowering of the percentage of government jobs reserved for Christians from 10% to 5%. (NOTE: Christians actually comprise less than 5% of Basra's population.) Potrous told us that unless the PC approved at least one of his projects, he would -- with the backing of Basra's Christian community -- resign from the PC. Potrous informed us of his interest to serve in the Council of Representatives if another reserved seat for Christians is created by its expansion.

Major General Mohammed Huweidi (August 6, 2009)

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Commander of the Iraqi Security Forces in Basra Province

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¶ 17. (SBU) Major General Mohammed highlighted the importance of attracting foreign investment to Basra to provide employment and reduce recruitment of terrorists. The general attributed his recent success in capturing three major terrorist targets to good U.S. intelligence combined with good Iraqi Army execution. He proposed a program to pay locals for information on terrorist targets, and suggested creating a joint committee of the Iraqi Army, Iraqi Police, and U.S. Military to improve intelligence and targeting operations.

Jalal Thiyab Thijeel (August 10, 2009)

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Secretary of the Movement of Free Iraqis

¶ 18. (SBU) Thijeel informed us of his three-year-old movement to improve the political, legal, and social standing of Iraq's estimated two-million-strong black community. He outlined what he saw as a pattern of ongoing discrimination based in a 1400-year history of slavery and treatment as second-class citizens. Thijeel said he was seeking USG and international support for his cause, and has had some success in getting his message out to the international media.

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